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ABSTRACT

Based on J. E. Grunig's four models of public relations practice (press agent/publicity, public information, and two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric practice), this paper examines the potential applicability of these models to internal communication systems in organizations. Following an introduction, in which Grunig's models are briefly explained, the paper discusses definitional issues; historical parallels between the development of organizational theory and the development of the four models of public relations practice; issues of managerial bias inherent in existing organizational communication research and consulting practices, as well as in at least some of the public relations models; and lines of future inquiry of common interest to the public relations researcher and the organizational communications researcher as a function of the models. Forty-eight references are given. (Author/SR)

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The Application of Grunig's Symmetry-Asymmetry Public Relations Models to Internal Communication Systems

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential applicability of Grunig's four models of public relations practice to internal communication systems. More specifically, the paper looks at definitional issues; historical parallels between the development of organizational theory and the predominant practice of each of the public relations models in organizations; issues regarding managerial bias in existing organizational communication research and consulting practices, as well as at least three of the public relations models; and lines of future inquiry of common interest to the public relations researcher and organizational communication researcher as a function of the models.

Introduction

Grunig posits four models of public relations practice: (a) the press agent/publicity practice of public relations; (b) the public-information practice of public relations; (c) the two-way asymmetric practice of public relations; and (d) the two-way symmetric practice of public relations. The progression of models is intended to coincide with a developmental history of public relations. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the press agent/publicity model of public relations practice was seen from 1850-1900, the public-information model of public relations practice began in about 1900 and carried through as the primary practice until the 1920s, the two-way asymmetric model of public relations practice developed in the 1920s, while the two-way symmetric model of public relations practice came into vogue in the 1960s and 1970s. The four models may be dichotomized by two variables: direction of communication and balance of intended effect (Gruning & Grunig, 1986). Grunig and Hunt described the press agentry model as one-way, asymmetrical; the public-information model as one-way, symmetrical; and the two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric models according to the labels given them. More recently, however, Grunig (1987) has taken the position that the public-information model is asymmetrical.

A symmetrical orientation is seen as involving a non-manipulative, interdependent, negotiable relationship between the

corporate entity as represented by the actions of the public relations agent and its environment, while an asymmetrical orientation is conceived as denoting a manipulative relationship overshadowed by dominance of the corporate entity over its public.

Given these orientations, the press-agentry model of public relations practice consists of the practitioner seeking as much media attention as possible for the client organization in the way of promotions. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), sports promotions would fit into this category. The public-information model of public relations practice requires the practitioner to generate fact sheets, consumer guidebooks, informational pamphlets, etc., for the purpose of informing the public about the organization. Examples of institutions practicing this type of public relations would include, according to Grunig and Hunt, government agencies, educational organizations, and other non-profit entities. The two-way asymmetric model of public relations practice suggests that the practitioner conducts environmental scanning of the target public involved in order to make an informed decision about the strategies to employ in an effort to get the public to take a desired action or accept a particular attitude in regard to the corporate entity (e.g., through corporate advocacy campaigns). Grunig and Hunt argue that companies that face considerable competition with their consumer products often utilize this form of public relations practice. Finally, the two-way symmetric model of public relations practice is characterized by

the organization negotiating with its environment, rather than dominating it. According to Grunig and Hunt, while competition may be the catalyst for firms practicing two-way asymmetrical public relations, regulation may be the catalyst for firms practicing the two-way symmetrical version, since for the latter evidence of socially responsible behavior may be critical to its existence. Operationally, the two-way symmetric practice of public relations might include, according to Grunig and Hunt, dialogue with the community to encourage a better understanding between corporate officials and members of the public. In an analysis of all four models of public relations practice, Grunig and Hunt advocate a contingency view, suggesting that the nature of the organization and its environment would dictate the appropriateness of one model over another in a particular situation.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to examine the applicability of Grunig's four-model configuration of public relations practice to internal communication systems in organizations. While an organization may practice the various public relations models simultaneously, this paper will assume that the label given to that organization will refer to the predominant practice evidenced. More specifically, this paper will take a look at definitional issues, historical parallels between the development of the four models of public relations practice and organizational theory, the issue of managerial bias inherent in some of the models and in

organizational communication research and consulting, and will project directions of lines of inquiry utilizing interests of the public relations researcher and the organizational communication researcher in correspondence with the public relations models. Following this will be conclusions which can be drawn from this analysis.

Definitional Issues

In the organizational communication literature symmetry and asymmetry are described in the context of organizational networks and interpersonal relationships. According to Monge and Eisenberg (1988):

> The symmetricality of a linkage refers to the degree to which both people enter into the same kind of relationship with each other. Linkages may be either symmetrical or asymmetrical. To illustrate, the supervisor-subordinate relationship is asymmetrical since the subordinate "reports to" the boss, but the boss does not "report to" the subordinate. The coworker relationship, on the other hand, is symmetrical because each "works with" the other, that is, they are both in the same kind of relationship. (p. 315).

There is some obvious parallel between the use of the terms symmetrical and asymmetrical in the public relations and organizational communication literature. While the corporate entity does not share a relationship with its environment

completely analogous to that between a supervisor and subordinate, the idea of dominance of one party over the other in an asymmetrical relationship seems to be common to some degree between contexts.

Historical Parallels

The four public relations models developed by Grunig are assumed to represent historical development of public relations practice, although Grunig and Hunt (1984) contend that all four models are existent in organizations today. Looking at each of the models as the primary mode of public relations practice during a particular historical period, one can attempt to parallel them against the organizational theory that was being developed concommitently to describe or prescribe management practices. The point in doing so is to note the emphasis placed on one-way and two-way forms of communication and the asymmetrical/symmetrical relational development forms comparatively.

The classical organizational theorists came into view during the period that Grunig and Hunt label as the emergence of the public-information model of public relations practice. In 1911 Frederick Taylor (1947) published his Principles of Scientic Management. His work represented the first attempt to focus systematically on the role of the manager in the industrial setting. Taylor viewed the employee as the "adjunct to the machine," as a means for the organization to achieve efficiency.

Among his principles was an emphasis upon cooperation between members of management and workers in order to accomplish organizational ends. Additionally, Taylor noted the importance of upward communication (Tompkins, 1984). Henri Fayol's principal work on administrative theory was initially published in 1916; it was not translated and available in English until 1949 from the original French version. Among his administrative principles was an emphasis on the importance of standing agreements between managers and employees (Tompkins, 1984). While Taylor ascribed to "functional foremanship," Fayol believed in linear supervision. Max Weber developed a theory of bureaucracy; he conceptualized organizations as featuring three forms of authority structure: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority. While his principal writings on bureaucracies were initially generated in the first two decades of this century, they were not translated into English from German until the 1940s. Among his concepts pertaining to bureaucracies were that of the "office hierarchy" and "levels of graded authority" (Tompkins, 1984). Taking Grunig's (1987) public-information model as the predominant form of public relations practice up against the simultaneous development of classical organizational theory, one can see some parallels in managerial perspectives toward an asymmetrical relationship with the environment and the workers, respectively, and one-way communication.

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the two-way asymmetric model of public relations practice first emerged in the 1920s. Mary Parker Follett (1951) originally published Creative Experience in 1924. Much later a collection of her essays and lectures were published in a volume entitled Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett, and edited by Fox and Urwick (1973). Four of her principles seem particularly appropriate to review here. First is that of circular response. According to Follett, communication is circular rather than linear; that is, the response of one party affects that of the other. Her concept of the evolving situation suggests that the circular response occurs not only between individual parties engaged in a communication event, but also between those parties and their environment, such that the behavior of the individual contributes to the situation to which he is responding (Bostdorff, 1985). Her third concept, integration, involves "the creation of a unique solution in which the desires of all involved parties are met" (Bostdorff, 1985, p. 5). Finally, her concept of authority recommends that "instead of working 'under' someone, each person involved works 'with' others and takes his/her orders from the authority of the situation" (Bostdorff, 1985, p. 6), such that management personnel and employees study a problem together and then utilize integration to arrive at an answer. Follett's views reflect an interdependency between management and employees, quite

different than the view expressed by the two-way asymmetric model of public relations between the corporate entity and its environment predominant at this time.

Probably the most significant theoretical development during the period in question was the emergence of the Human Relations movement founded by Elton Mayo. He and his associates conducted the Hawthorne studies at the Western Electric plant from 1927-1932. This work was reported by Roethlisberger and Dickson in Management and the Worker, published in 1939. Sanborn (1964) has argued that these studies "stand as the first serious scientific attack upon the problems of employee communication" (p. 6). According to Tompkins (1984), these studies demonstrated, among other things, that workers need informal group affiliation to meet their social needs, that management personnel must listen to their employees in order to encourage the upward communication process, and that an informal system exists at odds with the formal system reflected by the organizational chart.

In 1938 Chester Barnard's (1968) book The Functions of the Executive was originally published. According to Tompkins (1984), Barnard's writings reflect a systems view of organizational theorizing. Among the principles that Bernard espoused was that of cooperation. According to Bernard cooperation is an essential component in organizational functioning, such that the organization operates as a system of individuals "acting together." Bernard recognized the importance of the informal system as an adjunct to

the formal one. The informal system, according to Barnard, protects the values of the individual, allows cooperative purpose to emerge, and facilitates interaction among organizational members. Bernard's concept of authority posits that such authority is centered in the willingness of organizational members to cooperate, such that the locus of authority rests with the employee receiving the orders rather than the one issuing the orders. According to Bernard, a communication is considered authoritative when four conditions exist: (a) the communication is understood by the individual; (b) the individual perceives the communication as in line with organizational purposes; (c) the individual perceives the communication as in line with his or her own interests; and (d) the individual is capable of complying with the communication. Barnard's concepts, like those of Mary Parker Follett, seem to suggest a quite different relationship between parties (management and employees) than that espoused by the predominant public relations model (corporate entity and its environment).

Herbert Simon published Administrative Behavior in 1957. According to Simon, communication is "any process whereby decisional premises are transmitted from one member of an organization to another" (p. 154). Simon equated managerial action with decision-making processes. According to Simon, a rational decision can be arrived at through either factual premises or value premises, the choice of which can be manipulated by the

organization if it establishes the premises for the employee.

The last organizational theorist to emerge prior to the inception of Grunig's third public relations model to be discussed here is Chris Argyris, whose book Personality and Organization was published in 1957 and then in 1964 his book Integrating the Individual and the Organization. A human resources theorist, Argyris' works focus upon the relationship between the individual and the organization. He argued that the demands of the formal organization and the needs of the fully grown employee are incongruent, in that the rational organization imposes control over employees and at the same time suppresses the full and constructive release of employee psychological energy. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the two-way asymmetric model suggests that "the effects of the public relations are unbalanced in favor of the organization" (p. 23). With the emergence of the Human Relations and Human Resources Schools, organizations were becoming sensitized to the importance of assessing employee attitudes in the achievement of organizational goals. Both the Human Relations and Human Resources perspectives suggest the opening up of a more reciprocal relationship between management and workers; while organizational goals may have still been predominant, two-way communication became increasingly espoused.

The two-way symmetric model, according to Grunig and Hunt (1984), came into vogue in the 1960s and 1970s. Organizational theories continued to develop with a Human Resources perspective

(an extension of the Human Relations movement) or Social Systems perspective. Douglas McGregor introduced Theory X and Theory Y in The Human Side of Enterprise (1960) which outlined supervisor assumptions about subordinates, the first espousing the use of authority in order to achieve direction and control and the second espousing "integration" or the establishment of conditions whereby organizational members best achieve their own goals by putting their efforts into the success of the organization (p. 49).

In 1961 Rensis Likert published New Patterns of Management which described four styles of management, moving progressively from a traditional classical view of management domination over employees to a more contemporary employee involvement philosophy: (a) System I -- exploitive authoritative; (b) System II -- benevolent authoritative; (c) System III -- consultative; and (d) System IV -- participative. Likert advocated the use of the participative form of management style which emphasizes a principle of supportive relationships, group decision making, and high performance goals.

In 1966 Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn published The Social Psychology of Organizations which advocated an open systems view of organizations. Katz and Kahn, as Bernard, emphasized the need to subordinate individual goals over organizational goals. They viewed the organization as a "web of interrelated roles" (Littlejohn, 1983, p. 314). Like Bernard, Katz and Kahn suggested that authority relies on its acceptance by subordinates.

Principles of communication are central to their concept of organizational functioning.

Managerial Bias

The press-agentry model, the public-information model (Grunig, 1987), and two-way asymmetric model of public relations practice suggest a dominating stance taken by the corporate entity over the external public; in two cases, communication is one-way, in the other it is two-way. In all cases, management is "manipulating" the environment toward its own ends.

The majority of research in organizational communication and thus the "conventional wisdom on the design and management of organizations" (Smircich, 1983), p. 222) has emanated from a functionalist perspective. Such research has been aimed at examining the relationship among variables which contribute to organizational effectiveness through some type of causal model (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). As Smircich put it, "The functionalist researcher/consultant and manager are joined in a similar search: a search for predictability and control" (p. 223). Classical management theories, human relations theories, decision-making theories, and social systems theories have been developed from the perspective of managerial concerns (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

While research in organizational communication is increasingly moving toward an interpretive perspective, focusing on the social construction of reality by organizational actors, Smircich (1983)

claimed that the scholars conducting this research "often avoid the practical implications of their work" (p. 221). However, Putnam (1983) warned that "The interpretive approach is not necessarily immune to a managerial bias...However, by adopting a pluralistic view, interpretivists build multiple treatments of organizational reality into their purview" (p. 38).

The consulting process an organizational communication consultant (or public relations consultant) participates in inherently involves a managerial bias. Depending upon the particular consulting model employed [e.g., the Purchase model, the Doctor-Patient model, and the Process model (Schein, 1988)], the company may not only be involved in hiring and paying the consultant, it may also be involved in the determination of the research design, the collection of data, the diagnostic process itself, and the introduction and monitoring of the intervention. An organizational communication audit, for example, may require a liaison committee which works with the consultant at every step of the process. As such, there is a risk that management may impose its views upon the process and the results, restrict access to certain data sources, or simply undergo the process for the purpose of "window dressing" to placate employees who wish their views to be known. Whatever the case, management goals may dominate the process.

As interpretive research becomes more pervasive in the literature and more widely known outside academic circles, the view

that "the task of strategic management is to create and maintain a system of meaning that invokes particular values and purposes" (Smircich, 1983) may become a more dominant view among practitioners. Smircich would argue that such strategic managers adopting this view "are not simply actors in their organizations, rather they are creators of organizational symbols and realities" (p. 234). Interpretive consulting could encompass the examination of how an organization achieves shared meaning, "assisting organizational members in understanding how they enact their organizational reality" (Smircich, 1983, p. 239), looking at the organization as a "unique language community" (Redding & Tompkins, 1988, p. 26).

Critical researchers, a more recently emergent group in the organizational communication literature, are somewhat cynical about programs designed by organizations to increase worker participation in the decision-making processes (e.g., quality circles, team building, and work redesign). Deetz and Kersten (1983) argued that sociotechnical participation, reflected in programs such as these and in the theories of McGregor (1960), Likert (1961), and Argyris (1964), "utilizes unexploited worker initiative to improve work procedures" and therefore "is consistent with the functionalist goal of technical rationality" (p. 169). According to Deetz and and Kersten, "critical research advocates the creation of political participatory situations, sociotechnical programs can be co-opted" (p. 169).

Comparable Lines of Inquiry

At least two common areas of research interest to the public relations scholar and the organizational communication scholar can be threaded through the Grunig models in terms of the directionality of communication and symmetricality of the relationship between the entities involved. The positioning of the research areas into one of the models depends to some extent upon the view taken by the investigator performing the inquiry.

1. Corporate Advocacy Research. Sethi (1977) defined corporate advocacy as the "propagation of ideas and elucidation of controversial social issues in a manner that supports the position and interests of the sponsor while expressly denying the accuracy of facts and downgrading of the sponsor's opponent" (p. 7). Heath (1980) conceptualized the activity as the "research, analysis, design and mass dissemination of arguments on issues contested in the public dialogue in an attempt to create a favorable, reasonable, and informed public opinion which in turn influences institutions' operating environments" (p. 371). While a natural concern of public relations scholars, Putnam and Cheney (1985) suggested that "corporate advocacy is amenable to analysis through traditional sender-oriented argumentation methods and through contemporary process-oriented approaches" (p. 146).

Dionisopoulos and Hellweg (1987) provided a selected review of the corporate advocacy literature. Among the studies they reviewed were a number of rhetorical analyses of particular

corporate advocacy campaigns. These studies focused mainly upon the automotive industry (i.e., Foss, 1984; Geisler, 1984; Paonessa, 1984) and oil corporations (e.g., Crable & Vibbert, 1983; Simons, 1983; Vibbert, 1984); other rhetorical analyses included studies on the atomic power industry after Three Mile Island (Dionisopoulos & Crable, 1988), and various industries as a function of the ecology issue (Brown & Crable, 1973). It is perhaps interesting to note that with the exception of one of these studies (Paonessa, 1984), all of this research focused on only the relationship between the corporate entity and the external public; the Paonessa study examined not only the public external to the organization, but also the internal public as well. Cheney and Vibbert (1988) described corporate advocacy activity as an explicit shaping by a corporation of its "environment." Such a "manipulative" view suggests that this research may fit within Grunig's asymmetrical model of public relations practice.

2. Organizational Identification. According to Simon (1976), "A person identifies with a group when, in making a decision, he evaluates the several alternatives of choice in terms of the consequences for the specified group" (p. 205). Tompkins and Cheney (1985) argued that "from an organizational (or managerial) perspective, member identification is beneficial in that it 'guarantees' that decisions will be consistent with organizational objectives" (p. 191). Based on the work of Barnard (1968) and Simon (1976), Tompkins and Cheney concluded that through

organizational identification processes, "the individual acquires an 'organizational personality'; he or she finds an area of acceptance within which he or she will assume the 'role' of the organization, accepting the value and factual premises of the organization as relevant to on-the-job decisions" (p. 191). A number of studies have been conducted by communication scholars on organizational identification including Tompkins, Fisher, Infante, and Tompkins (1975); Cheney (1983a); Cheney (1983b); Tompkins and Cheney (1983); and Cheney and Tompkins (1987). Cheney (1983a) examined organizational identification strategies utilized by organizations in their internal house organizations, noting the use of three such strategies developed by Burke, the common ground technique (an overt revelation of shared values), antithesis (uniting the audience against a common enemy), the transcendent or assumed "we" (subtle use of certain unifying pronouns), and another developed by the researcher, unifying symbols (e.g., corporate slogans or logos). Such identification strategies would seem to be also directed at an external audience through corporate advertising through the use, for example, of employee testimonials, company slogans, and the espousal of shared values. Given that the latter, if not also the former, involves "manipulating" an environment, such practice might also reflect Grunig's asymmetric model of public relations.

Conclusions

As Cheney and Vibbert (1988) noted "organizations can no longer afford to let others control their communicative agenda" (p. 173). The oil embargo of 1973 dramatically changed the way organizations deal with their consuming publics as well as the government (Cheney & Vibbert). Issues management has not only, however, become a concern for organizations in dealing with their environments, but also in dealing with their own employees; internal and external discourse are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually influential (Cheney & Vibbert). Research by Paonessa (1984) suggested that General Motors' "communication officers explicitly recognized that their messages to employees might well translate into advocacy with respect to the public at large" (Cheney & Vibbert, p. 181). It is perhaps surprising then that the Paonessa research is the only corporate advocacy study in the literature that looks at both the internal and external public in connection with the advocacy campaign involved. Likewise, Cheney and Vibbert recommended that research on "internal corporate communications, such as house organs, should be considered in conjunction with external communications that are traditionally labeled as public relations" (p. 180). Research by Tompkins and Cheney (1985) suggested that some corporations are moving away from traditional forms of control over employees to what they call a postbureaucratic type, concertive control. This type, they assert, emphasizes teamwork and coordination of effort, a blurring of line

and staff distinctions, flexibility and innovation, a relative concensus of values, and a flat hierarchy (p. 184). According to Tompkins and Cheney, "In the concertive organization, the explicit written rules and regulations are replaced by the common understanding of values, objectives, and means of achievement, along with a deep appreciation for the organization's 'mission'" (p. 184). As Tompkins and Cheney noted, Peters and Waterman (1982) would likely say that this type of organization would exhibit simultaneous loose and tight properties, such that the employees "can be depended upon to act within a range of alternatives tied to implicit but highly motivating core values" (p. 184). Pacanowsky's (1988) analysis of empowerment practices at W. L. Gore & Associates might fit this model.

However, inherent even within such a corporate model may be the use of what Perrow (1979) has called unobtrusive control and what Tompkins and Cheney (1985) have further developed through a rhetorical framework utilizing Simon's (1976) concept of decisional premises and Barnard's (1968) concept of "inculcation of motives." Tompkins and Cheney essentially argued that the organization can subtly through inculcative processes control employees to make decisions in accordance with core values. While the concertive organization gives the impression of being two-way, symmetrical in its communication with employees, one might also contend that use of unobtrusive control techniques would suggest a more manipulative practice (reflected in the two-way asymmetric model).

The issue of whether two-way symmetrical organizations exist may be resolved by developing a continuum between the two-way asymmetric practice and a true two-way symmetric practice, such that organizations both internally and externally can be measured more by an infinite number of points than a "either-or" picture might suggest. Finally, the argument could be made that assigning one of the two viewpoints to a particular organization is dependent upon who is doing the labelling. While the practitioner might contend that his organization is not manipulating its internal or external public, that it is actively listening and responding to their concerns through an interdependent relationship, the third-party observer might regard management's interests being maintained through corporate advocacy techniques (for the external public) or through unobtrusive control techniques (for the internal public).

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